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SUBJECT: Comoros National Assembly Passes (Sort Of) Economic Citizenship Law

REF: ANTAN 523

**¶11.** (SBU) SUMMARY: The diplomatic corps was twice convoked December 3 for contradictory versions of recent events at the National Assembly on a vote for an "economic citizenship" law. First, National Assembly President Bounou and Grande Comore Island President Abdouwahabi (both opposition leaders) told the diplomatic corps the "dictatorial Sambi regime" had violated procedure to illegally pass a bill offering Comoran citizenship to wealthy foreigners. Then, no less than six Union Ministers met the diplomatic corps to argue the Union Government's case that despite Bounou's reticence, a majority of Deputies actually voted to pass the law. It remains to be seen if the law will in fact be promulgated. END SUMMARY.

Opposition Version...

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**¶12.** (SBU) National Assembly President Bounou and Grande Comore Island President (Governor) Abdouwahabi convoked the diplomatic corps December 3 to complain of the "dictatorial Sambi regime." The opposition version was that a recent session of the National Assembly voted to reject the GOC-sponsored bill on "economic citizenship." They further asserted that the Assembly Vice President, with GOC support, reconvened Deputies outside procedure to "illegally" pass the bill. Bounou vowed to fight against the promulgation of the law, which he argued was not properly passed.

**¶13.** (SBU) Continuing the opposition list of grievances, Abdouwahabi complained that Sambi had added a color to the national emblem, replaced the Constitutional Court President in June, replaced state enterprise directors general in Moheli, allowed the mandates of island assemblies in Anjouan and Moheli to lapse, and now planned a constitutional referendum to "consolidate his power." African Union ResRep Mourad took the opportunity (following the recent visit of AU Special Envoy Madeira) to ask Abdouwahabi if now were not perhaps the time to convene the Technical Preparatory Committee (CTP) to pave the way for Inter-Comoran Dialogue. Abdouwahabi (who in September refused high-level talks in favor of a technical level format) refused to send any Grande Comore officials for the CTP, instead insisting meetings should occur at a high level. (Comment: Bounou and Abdouwahabi are playing into Sambi's hands. By refusing dialogue, they give the Union the excuse to ignore the opposition and push their own agenda. End Comment)

... Union Government Version

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**¶14.** (SBU) Later December 3, Minister of Defense (and GOC Cabinet Director) Dossar, with five other ministers, convoked the diplomatic corps to share their version. He said 18 deputies out of 33 voted in favor of the economic citizenship law. Dossar accused Bounou of being against the law, making a mockery of procedure, and refusing to allow the majority of deputies to be heard. The GOC recognizes the second vote, convened by the Assembly Vice President after

Bounou left parliament, at which 14 deputies plus four proxies were counted as 18 in favor of passing the law. Minister Dossar said the GOC has officially requested an affidavit from Bounou confirming the bill passed so that President Sambi can sign it into law.

¶5. (SBU) When diplomats shared the alternate version from the same morning, Minister Dossar was dismissive and insisted the Bounou had lost the confidence of deputies and was likely to be removed as President. He justified the economic citizenship law as necessary to promote investment in the Comoros; to offer guarantees to wealthy foreigners that their capital would be protected. Not full citizenship, Dossar explained, but a "status" that would offer special privileges to investors. He suggested that such investors would get passports, but not get full rights to vote in the Comoros.

Comoro Gulf Holdings

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¶6. (SBU) Working closely with the Union Government, the private Kuwaiti investment group, Comoro Gulf Holdings (CGH) has actively worked for passage of this law, funding a "fact-finding" trip (including gifts of laptops and other goodies) for six Deputies to Kuwait. All voted against the bill in July and now are voting in favor. The GOC and CGH say the economic citizenship law is purely to offer guarantees and confidence to investors; with nothing to do with "4,000 stateless Bedouin families," as appeared to be the case in the July version of the bill (REFTEL). An estimated 200 Comorans protested in Moroni December 4 against the economic citizenship law.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: A member of the diplomatic corps quipped, "as usual, the GOC's story is better than the opposition." The GOC outmaneuvered the hapless Bounou and obstructionist Abdouwahabi. Neither side appears to have followed legal procedures to the letter, but the diplomatic corps is persuaded that in fact 18 deputies voted in favor of the law; thus the Union is more in the right, and the opposition is more in the wrong. Comoran public opinion remains convinced that thousands of Bedouins could descend on Moroni any day; the GOC has done no public outreach to assuage their fears.

¶8. (SBU) Comment Continued: The motivation behind CGH's advocacy for this bill is unclear. On the surface and according to their officials, this is purely to promote investment (including their own) with assurances and guarantees. However, suspicion looms in the Comoros that CGH in fact has some reason to seek this law in order to facilitate passports for thousands of stateless Bedouins. They deny this, but once passed, it is possible the law could serve both purposes. Perhaps the assurances CGH really seeks are to powerful interests in Kuwait to fix their Bedouin problem. End Comment.

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